

## **WISCONSIN PREMIERS NATIONAL EFFORT TO FIGHT STIGMA AND DISCRIMINATION ASSOCIATED WITH MENTAL ILLNESSES**

Announced May 4, 2004 – Lieutenant Governor Barbara Lawton, with Wisconsin United for Mental Health (WUMH), announced today that Wisconsin is launching a public service campaign to fight stigma through television and radio public service announcements and print media. Wisconsin is among eight states working with the Elimination of Barriers Initiative (EBI), a pilot program established by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (SAMHSA) of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USHHS). EBI was developed to eliminate stigma and discrimination experienced by persons with mental illnesses.

According to the USHHS, an estimated 22 to 23-percent of the U.S. population experiences a mental disorder in any given year. However, almost half of these individuals do not seek treatment. This is often due to the shame associated with mental illnesses in our society. In fact, a Surgeon General's report identified stigma among the barriers that discourage people from seeking care for mental illnesses.

EBI is a three-year initiative aimed at identifying effective public education approaches and designing strategies to educate the public in order to combat stigma and discrimination associated with mental illnesses that millions of Americans face every day. PSAs will be released in May in the eight participating states. The other states chosen with Wisconsin include California, Florida, Massachusetts, North Carolina, Ohio, Pennsylvania and Texas.

Wisconsin is serving as the flagship state for EBI's national effort. This is because of the hard work that WUMH has already spent on anti-stigma efforts. WUMH, a non-profit group of health organizations, was first launched in 2002 through an educational grant from Eli Lilly & Company. To celebrate these efforts and to launch the EBI campaign, Lt. Gov. Lawton today unveiled the PSAs during a "Celebration of Recovery" at the State Capitol.

The Wisconsin Department of Health and Family Services (DHFS) Recovery Task Force and WUMH sponsored the "Celebration of Recovery." WUMH is working to provide information to the public to help reduce stigma. The "Celebration of Recovery" event held on Tuesday featured area residents and mental health consumers who shared their stories about recovery. Special guest speaker was Nora Jacobson, author of *In Recovery: The Making of Mental Health Policy*.

"One of WUMH's missions is to eliminate stigma in Wisconsin and to promote recovery," said Nino Amato, WUMH co-chair. "The news and mass media can play an important role in breaking down stereotypes and stigma, which is why this PSA effort is so important."

Additional information about mental illness can be found on DHFS' Web site at: <http://dhfs.wisconsin.gov> or the WUMH's Web site at: [www.wimentalhealth.org](http://www.wimentalhealth.org). For more information about the USHHS and SAMHSA's efforts surrounding mental illness and substance abuse, visit [www.samhsa.gov](http://www.samhsa.gov).